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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4615
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5465
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0158
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 5884
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SUBJECT: DELHI DIARY, JAN 7-11

REF: A. 07 NEW DELHI 5119

[1](#)B. 07 KOLKATA 359

[1](#)C. 07 KOLKATA 356

[1](#)1. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for January 7-11, 2007, that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

- India, Israeli Kick Off 2008 with High-Level Defense Talks
- India Remains Israel's Largest Defense Customer
- National Defense Interest Trumps Ideological Posturing
- Defense Minister Wraps Up "Result-Oriented" Trip to Malaysia
- India and China Move to Share Intel
- Three Million Muslims Gather in Uttar Pradesh
- Prime Minister Inspects Warship Bought From the U.S.
- Mayawati Demands Center Protection, Threatens Withdrawal
- Taslima Controversy Continues

India, Israeli Kick Off 2008 with High-Level Defense Talks

[1](#)2. (U) The Chairman of the Indian military's Chiefs of Staff, Indian Navy Chief Admiral Sureesh Mehta, left January 3 on a four-day official visit to Israel for talks with Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff on strengthening Indo-Israeli military ties. This top-level military visit comes on the heels of the December 31 bilateral defense Joint Working Group (JWG) in New Delhi, co-chaired by Indian Defense Secretary Vijay Singh and his counterpart Brigadier General (retired) Pinchus Buchris. While in New Delhi Buchris met with National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan, and both sides reportedly decided that India and Israel should meet regularly to share intelligence as part of the effort to fight global terrorism. Prakash Karat, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist),

publicly called for a halt in India's military ties with Israel on December 31, 2007, "until (Israel) comes to the negotiating table and arrive(s) at a reasonable settlement with Palestine."

India Remains Israel's Largest Defense Customer

¶3. (U) According to Indian media, Israeli defense officials assured their counterparts on January 1 that the US-made Phalcon AWACS radar systems sold by Israel to India for USD 1.2 billion would finally be delivered in January 2008, after long delays. According to the Israeli Defense Ministry, India has been Israel's largest customer for the fifth year in a row, its purchases comprising 50 percent of Israel's defense exports. Israel has emerged in the last few years as New Delhi's second largest arms supplier (after Russia), having sold India USD 1.6 billion worth of weaponry and defense systems in 2007. Israel became the world's fourth largest arms exporting nation in 2007, thanks mainly to its military contracts with India.

National Defense Interest Trumps Ideological Posturing

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Prakash Karat and his Communist Party were able to bully the Congress-led UPA Government into backpedaling on the U.S.-India civilian nuclear deal this past autumn, yet protests against Indo-Israeli ties have failed to have the same effect. Although recent high-level military exchanges between Tel Aviv and New Delhi and the

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continuing big-ticket arms sales serve to demonstrate that the Indian defense community can continue to strengthen its strategic relationship with Israel in spite of domestic communist criticism, Post expects the Left -- and Indian Muslims -- will continue to try to serve as a check on just how far India can go with the broader Israel relationship. End Comment.

Defense Minister Wraps Up "Result-Oriented" Trip to Malaysia

¶5. (SBU) At the outset of his January 6-8 Malaysia visit, Indian Defense Minister A.K. Antony stressed that the GOI's "Look East" policy, designed to open up ASEAN markets to India's poor northeastern states, "is nothing against China." However, describing his trip as "result-oriented" in a joint press statement, Antony concluded several deals that elevate India-Malaysia defense cooperation to a new high that could help to counter recent Chinese strides in the region. India agreed to train Malaysian Air Force personnel to operate the Su-30 MKI aircraft, noting that 31 Indian Air Force specialists will be based in Malaysia for two years starting in February. In addition, the two sides emphasized naval cooperation and noted that Malaysia will likely purchase the Scorpene class submarine which are slated to be built in India. Referring to security in the Straits of Malacca, Malaysian Defense Minister Najib said that, "India is ready to work closely with us," pointing out that India respected the principle that "the primary responsibility for the security and safety aspects of Malacca lie with the littoral states."

¶6. (SBU) On the economic front, Malaysia announced that India's IRCON International Ltd., a public sector venture that reports to India's Ministry of Railways, was awarded the USD 1.08 billion project to construct a 100-kilometer two-track network between Seremban and Gemas. The deal has been in the works since 2003 and a source of bilateral tension, according to media sources. Antony also discussed the plight of ethnic Indians in Malaysia that are protesting

their marginalization in Malaysian society. The timing suggests that Malaysia may have decided to award the rail contract in exchange for less GOI pressure regarding official discrimination against Malaysia's ethnic Indians.

India and China Move to Share Intel

¶7. (SBU) Paris Intelligence Online, an internet subscription service run by French Indigo Publications, reported that China's state security ministry and India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) announced plans to establish a joint intelligence center. The announcement comes on the heels of December's "Hand-in-Hand" joint army exercise in Yunnan province; a counter terror exercise involving approximately 100 special forces personnel from each side. As with "Hand-in-Hand," if true, the joint intelligence center is likely an effort to gloss over the logjam over their disputed border and signal to India's Left that the UPA government continues to be open to intelligence sharing and military exercises with all the players in Asia and is not putting all of its eggs in America's basket. It is doubtful that any real intelligence will be exchanged given India's suspicions about China's intentions in the region and the lingering effects of the 1962 border war defeat to the Indian psyche.

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"Three Million" Muslims Gather in Uttar Pradesh

¶8. (SBU) From December 28 to January 1 organizers claimed approximately three million Muslims from India and around the world descended on the small town of Sherwan in Uttar Pradesh for an international conference, or Alami Ijtema. The congregation was organized by the revivalist Tablighi Jamaat. Maulana Khalid Rashid of Lucknow's oldest Islamic seminary, Firangi Mahal, described the event to the press as, "The first mass-scale Muslim congregation in one place in India. Basically it is to pray for world peace and to enlighten the Muslim community about Islamic laws, how to adopt Islamic laws in their daily life and the importance of education." The choice of location is significant. Sherwan is in the heart of moderate Barelvi Islam in India while Tablighi Jamaat is heavily influenced by Wahabi thinking. Embassy sources report some rise in Wahabi influence in the area.

Prime Minister Inspects Warship Bought From the U.S.

¶9. (U) Prime Minister Singh went on board the INS Jalashwa on January 3rd, for a personal and up-close look at the warship that the Indian Navy purchased from the U.S. The Jalashwa, a 16,900 ton amphibious Landing Platform Dock (LPD) began its career as the USS Trenton and served the US Navy for more than three decades before being sold and transferred to the Indian Navy in 2007.

Mayawati Demands Center Protection, Threatens Withdrawal

¶10. (SBU) On January 8th, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati accused Congress of conspiring to eliminate her because they denied her request for Special Protection Group (SPG) cover, currently only extended to prime ministers and former prime ministers. Mayawati threatened to withdraw BSP support from the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Congress, however, remained unfazed and characterized the conspiracy allegations as "completely baseless and absolutely unacceptable." Congress

called her threat a "pressure tactic" to get SPG cover and divert public attention from her disproportionate assets corruption case. A final BSP decision on withdrawal of support will be taken after a party meeting on January 15. Comment: The Congress-Mayawati spat follows a couple of terrorist incidents in U.P. and is being used by Mayawati to distance herself from the UPA in the run up to national elections before May 2009.

Taslima Controversy Continues

¶11. (U) A group of seven Indian Muslim organizations, including the two conservative Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and Jamiat-e-Ulama Hind, met on January 8 to publicly oppose Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen's Indian visa extension. Nasreen's writings are purported by some Muslims to have insulted the Islamic faith. This is the first official statement made by the Indian Muslim community after a group of Indian Muslims protested Nasreen's stay in Kolkata in November (refs B and C). The Muslim groups urged the Prime Minister to remember the religious sensitivities of Indian Muslims. The UPA government provided Nasreen safe haven in the capital after her expulsion from Kolkata. Soon after the January 8 meeting, UPA Information and Broadcasting Minister, priya Ranjan Das Munshi stated that Nasreen should apologize

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to the country's Muslim community for hurting their religious sentiments and intimated that her book "Dwikhandita" might be banned in the country. It had previously been banned in W. Bengal.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: Even though few in the Indian Muslim community are familiar with Nasreen's work, there is a general sense amongst the Indian Muslims community that her writings have somehow insulted or disparaged Islam. The Muslim groups' public opposition is a reflection of this unhappiness with Nasreen. There are also politics at play. The Communist Party of India Marxist (CPM) had originally driven Nasreen out of Kolkata to divert attention from the CPM's central role in the Nandigram violence, as well as to win favor from Muslims who were the main victims of the Nandigram brutality (ref E). The Muslim groups have put pressure once again on the UPA government to act more decisively on Nasreen. Vote bank politics has been an important factor in the Nasreen controversy. India's political parties are ready to use any target of opportunity available to pander to voting groups in preparation for the next national election, due before May 2009. The UPA's hot-cold response in the Nasreen affair illustrates that the Congress Party, the original and still most prolific practitioner of vote bank pandering, is attempting to juggle its national image and the Muslim vote. End Comment.

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